

How Charleston County Uses a Staff Newsletter

By GERALD J. SPECTER, M.P.H.

NEW AND VIEWS, the staff newsletter of the Charleston County (S. C.) Health Department, made its first appearance in December 1952. Since then, 30 issues have come off the press.

The idea of a house organ is not new. Nor is the use to which a house organ was put in our health department any different from what you would ordinarily expect to find. The value in using a departmental publication can only be measured by asking, "Does it accomplish what it has set out to do?"

Two years ago, there was a noticeable lack of communication among staff members and divisions in this health department. Each employee was busily engaged in performing his own particular job. Each division was principally concerned with its own objectives rather than with those of the overall department program. Each division saw health problems only in its own light.

Perhaps this atmosphere was partly due to a lack of understanding of each member's place on the health department team and of how one staff member could supplement the work of another. Could this be the situation?

What aid could the sanitarian be to the public health nurse in the district?

How did the laboratory staff fit into the picture?

What kept the statistical clerks, the clinic personnel, the laboratory technicians, and some of the lesser known workers so very busy?

What were we all doing?

For example: What were the sanitarians doing in connection with the county's new program of regulating subdivisions? What were the public health nurses doing to improve the rate of diphtheria immunization? What was the health council doing about dental health education in the public schools?

These were some of the questions that we thought needed answering if the "oneness" of team approach was to be achieved in our county. This problem of staff communication became the main topic of discussion at a meeting of the health officer and division supervisors, where it was unanimously decided to undertake to educate each staff member about the position on the team assigned to his teammates.

Many suggestions were offered. One was to hold staff seminars. Another proposed inservice training for each division, using these sessions for outlining the functions of all other divisions. A third suggestion was to have some method of keeping staff members informed and up to date on what was happening within the entire department.

The idea of circulating a monthly health department newsletter was broached to the staff. Each division would be asked to contribute information that would answer many of the questions staff members might have about other health jobs within the program. Staff members would also be invited to contribute personal items to give the newsletter an informal touch.

News, Views, and Information

A poll of the entire staff told us that a newsletter would be received with enthusiasm, and plans were made to get into print as soon as possible.

No attempt was made to make *News and Views* a journalistic masterpiece. Its tone is informal, yet distinctive.

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Early issues featured news about the activities of the various divisions.

The news is not confined to health department happenings specifically—mention is made of extracurricular activities. Articles of special public health interest to the staff are also used. A special section in each issue is devoted to birthday greetings and mention of service records. Special stories cite honors received by employees.

As time went by, we received more news items than we could possibly use in a single issue. When this happened, we enlarged our newsletter from the original one sheet to double this size.

In format, *News and Views* is mimeographed on 8½-inch by 11-inch paper. Each page is typed in two columns. Items are kept brief, personal, and informal. There is no set space restriction. Only the amount of news received determines how many pages an issue will contain.

The early runs numbered 75 copies until requests for the newsletter from outside the county department began to come in. The circulation list has been expanded to include staff members of the South Carolina State Board of Health, members of our own board of health, members of the county council, the legislative delegates from our district and members of their staff, former employees of our department, local voluntary health agencies, and many others. Circulation now exceeds 250 copies.

A brief estimate of costs for a 4-side, 2-page issue, follows:

<i>Supplies</i>	<i>Cost</i>
4 stencils ¹	\$0. 60
½ ream. paper.....	. 55
Ink (approximate).....	. 25
2d class postage.....	2. 00
1st class postage.....	1. 50
Envelopes.....	. 80

Total cost for printing and mailing²..... \$5. 70

¹ The masthead page can be produced in larger quantities in advance.

² 40 percent of distribution made in building where health department and other agency offices are located.

After 25 issues of the newsletter, in July 1954, we asked our 68 staff members to help us evaluate *News and Views*. Their answers to a

questionnaire provided a small study to help us determine whether the letter was accomplishing what it had set out to do.

The Evaluation

The first inquiry dealt with the extent to which each staff member read the house organ—

80 percent said they read *News and Views* thoroughly.

5 percent answered that it was only partly read.

15 percent did not comment.

We next asked how well do most items interest the reader—

75 percent answered that most items were of interest to them.

10 percent indicated fair interest.

15 percent had no opinion.

Another question asked whether *News and Views* has helped the individual to know more about health department activities other than his own—

75 percent answered that it has helped.

10 percent answered that it has helped somewhat.

15 percent had no comment.

We also wanted to know to what degree, as a result of reading the newsletter, the reader became familiar with the overall program of the health department—

67 percent replied, "Very much more."

25 percent stated that they were only a little more familiar with the overall program.

3 percent said their awareness was the same as before.

5 percent did not comment.

Next, we asked whether *News and Views* helped clarify an individual's understanding of the health department's program by familiarizing him with the work of the various divisions—

70 percent indicated that it had accomplished this purpose.

5 percent indicated that it had not.

10 percent were undecided.

15 percent had no comment.

When we asked whether a newsletter such as ours helps cement relationships among staff personnel, we received a more divided reply—

58 percent thought the relationship was much improved.

32 percent felt relationships had improved a little.

10 percent had no opinion.

We then asked, "Do you think having a newsletter has been worth while?" To this—

85 percent answered, "Very much so."

5 percent said such newsletter was all right.

10 percent made no comment.

No one answered that *News and Views* was not worth while.

Our final question asked whether each staff member was satisfied with *News and Views* as it now stands—

85 percent replied they were satisfied.

5 percent believed some changes were in order.

10 percent did not comment on this question.

From their answers, the staff seems to think *News and Views* has helped to bring each individual closer to one another. It has helped, we believe, to contribute to the feeling of "oneness," so very much needed and has given direction and insight to the team approach.

We realize that a staff newsletter is not the complete answer, but from all indications, it seems to be a start in the right direction. Other steps being undertaken are joint planning, regularly scheduled general staff conferences, inservice training programs, and free exchange of ideas. There is no single panacea, but we hope all these efforts will produce results.

An Important Date



Each month your health department and many hospitals, laboratories, schools, clinics, and homes receive a copy of PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS, mailed to arrive on the 20th, or even earlier, depending upon geographic location of the subscriber.

Its pages carry timely research reports, analyses of current trends, new methods, concepts, and ideas, and topical reviews for the busy scientist, teacher, or public health worker. Capsule coverage of important public health meetings, like those of the American Public Health Association, help the PHR reader.

Not all our readers receive the journal on the delivery date. An official copy is trickled down to them through a series of other readers. Sometimes the trickle slows to a complete halt.

You can have your personal copy promptly. Use the subscription blank on the inside back cover. Let the 20th of each month be an important date for you, too.